

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
7th June 2022

READINGS

The Lord is merciful and loving,
slow to become angry and full of constant love.
He does not keep on rebuking; he is not angry forever.
He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us according to our sins and wrongs.
As high as the sky is above the earth,
so great is his love for those who honour him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our sins from us.
As a father is kind to his children,
so the Lord is kind to those who honour him.

Psalm 103:8-13

For when we were still helpless sinners, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us—it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! By his blood we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by him from God's anger! We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life! But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God's friends.

Romans 5:6-11 (Good News Translation)

REFLECTION

Fiorello La Guardia was mayor of New York during the Great Depression, and he was quite a character. La Guardia is acclaimed as one of the greatest mayors in American history. La Guardia was frequently cross-endorsed by parties other than his own. A lawyer by training, he introduced many reforms in the city and had a passion to protect its people, especially the poorest. La Guardia would ride the city fire trucks, take entire orphanages to baseball games and whenever the city newspapers went on strike, he would get on the radio and read the Sunday "funnies" to the children. As a mark of respect to him, New York's airport, still bears his name.

One bitter cold winter's night in 1935, Mayor LaGuardia turned up in a night court that served the poorest ward in the city, dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. After he heard a few cases, a tattered old woman was brought before him, accused of stealing a loaf of bread.

She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick and her grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, insisted on pressing charges. "My store is in a very bad neighborhood, your honor," he said. "She's got to be punished in order to teach other people a lesson."

The mayor sighed. He turned to the old woman and said, "I've got to punish you," he said. "The law makes no exception - ten dollars or ten days in jail."

But even as he spoke, LaGuardia was reaching into his pocket and pulling out a ten dollar bill. "Here is the woman's fine," he said, "and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this court room fifty cents for living in a city where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Baliff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, the New York Times reported that \$47.50 was turned over to the bewildered old woman. It was given by the red-faced store owner, some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations and city policemen - and they all gave their mayor a standing ovation as they handed over their money.

Hearing this story, I am reminded of the work of God which lies at the heart of our faith. Sin that which is offensive to God because it is against the nature and identity of God. Each of us is marked as sinners, and each of our sins brings with it its due punishment. There are no exceptions! Every sin must be paid. God's justice is holy and righteous and the punishment for sin cannot be ignored. Just as the woman before La Guardia had to pay the fine for her wrongdoing, so God must punish our sin.

And just as La Guardia at the same time as pronouncing judgement pays the consequences of that judgement for the woman, so God in pronouncing judgement upon our sins, at the same time pays for them on the cross. Our punishment is met and we are free.

This is the love of God which Paul speaks about in our reading this week from...

And such is the love of God that having forgiven our sins, his blessing and his love do not stop there, for God then welcomes us as beloved and offers to share all our lives with us. And like the woman in the story, we end up with more than we could ever dream

possible, we are free and we are forgiven, and we are blessed to be called the family of God. This is the love of God for us.

Amen

PRAYER

Holy and Righteous
God in perfect purity.

No justice is as true as your justice.

You leave no sin unpunished
And before your holiness all wrongdoing is destroyed.

But you do not destroy us,
Loving God,
You will not let sin crush us.
You have both issued the sentence and paid the cost,
You have stood in our place,
And borne on yourself what should have been our consequences.

And now you welcome us
As family,
As beloved,
As precious and perfect,
Your children,
Held in a parent's grasp.

Thank you loving God,
May we respond with our love and our devotion
And our commitment to live as your people
And share your good news.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

